

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS

Luke 9:28-36

Key Verse: 9:29

"As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning."

The earthly messianic ministry of Jesus is almost over. Now Jesus had to go up to Jerusalem to die on the cross to save his people from their sins. Before going up to Jerusalem, Jesus went up to a mountain. While Jesus was praying, Jesus was transfigured. This event is commonly called "The Transfiguration of Jesus." Through this event, Jesus hoped his disciples would open their spiritual eyes and get a glimpse of Jesus' original image as God. Most importantly, Jesus wanted to show them a preview of the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, so that they might stand firm at the time of his crucifixion. Also, in this event, Jesus talks with Moses and Elijah for counseling about his going up to Jerusalem to die on the cross as a ransom sacrifice and rise again on the third day. May God help us to erase all the evil images in us and imprint in our hearts the glorious image of Jesus as God. First, Jesus transfigured (28,29).

This event begins with the words, "About eight days after Jesus said this..." (28). This refers to Peter's confession of faith, "The Christ of God." After this, Jesus gave Peter and the other disciples a period of eight days to rest. They needed this time to meditate on and confirm the confession of faith Peter had made. After this, Jesus took the three top disciples, Peter, John and James, with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. Only Luke, a Gentile, emphasizes the fact that Jesus went up the mount to pray. This prayer was for the sake of Jesus himself, because he had to suffer and die as a ransom sacrifice for the sin of the world.

Traditionally, Mount Tabor has been understood as the place where the transfiguration occurred, but this place is too far away from Caesarea Philippi. Mount Hermon also seems to be far from certain. Usually people go up onto a mountain to see flourishing foliage or beautifully colored autumn leaves. Many people enjoy seeing grandiose mountain ranges, and they enjoy the

awesomeness of the mountains. On the mountain, some cry; some sing; some think about transitory human life. But Jesus went up the mount to pray for the upcoming crucifixion in Jerusalem.

Before Jesus climbed the Mount of Transfiguration, he appeared to his disciples as a poor man. Jesus' heart was broken while shepherding the flock of God. He was regarded as a friend of tax collectors, and a father to a despicable Samaritan woman, and a shepherd of the downtrodden masses. He bore the sorrow and pain of God's flock, so much so that he looked so pathetic and his face was pain-stricken.

Look at verse 29. "As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning." Jesus' face was pathetically disfigured in the course of shepherding the flock of God. But when Jesus prayed to God on the mountain, he was transfigured, and his face shone as bright as a flash of lightning. Even his shepherd clothes became whiter than snow. Our Jesus is glorious. John portrayed his original image as God in Revelation 1:14: "His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire." This glorious Jesus gave up all his heavenly glory and came to this world to save us from our sins. In the course of shepherding the flock of God, he was despised and rejected. And his face was disfigured and now Jesus was praying before going up to Jerusalem.

Second, Jesus talks with Moses and Elijah (30,31).

Look at verses 30,31a. "Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus." Moses and Elijah worked hard for God and died sorrowfully. So their appearance on the mount should have been doleful and gloomy. But to our surprise, these two men of mission, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor. Their sufferings because of their mission did not devastate them at all. Rather, they were refined, ennobled and glorified even if they had lived a life of mission. Their lives of mission were short in terms of time and space. But their privilege of enjoying the majestic glory of God lasts forever.

Why then do only Moses and Elijah appear in this glorious event, regardless of many outstanding prophets such as Samuel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah,

David or John the Baptist? There was a specific reason. They were all God's servants used as deliverers of his people. As we know, Jesus came to this world to save men from their sins. We can see that Jesus and Moses and Elijah had three common factors.

First common factor, they were all deliverers of his people. In fulfilling God's will, deliverance is the first step. As we know well, God called Moses in order to deliver his people from slavery in Egypt. This deliverance was literally impossible, because the Egyptian Empire was one of the world powers and its king Pharaoh was as strong as Joseph Stalin. On the other hand, the people of Israel, as slave people, were smitten and crushed by hard labor, and a slave mentality was deeply imbedded in them after having lived in Egypt for 430 years as slaves. In this situation, God called Moses when he was 80 years old to deliver his people. Through much suffering, Moses delivered his people as God had commanded (Ex 5-12).

God called Elijah to deliver his people from Baal worship. Elijah lived in the time of King Ahab. Ahab was a childish king. His wife Jezebel was outrageous and a Baal worshiper. Queen Jezebel abandoned God Almighty and made Baal, the god of agriculture, their national god. At that time, the people of Israel were degenerated into ungodly and animal men. It was not an easy task for Elijah to deliver his people to God, for they were very sick with cultural diseases. Elijah suffered endlessly all by himself to deliver his people to God. Once Elijah challenged 450 Baal priests to prove whose God was the real God. The contest was to burn a sacrifice with fire. Baal god could not burn the bull sacrifice. But the God of Elijah, the Almighty God, burnt the bull sacrifice on the altar, and also the fire licked up the water in the trench. Elijah won the battle. Then he destroyed 450 Baal priests in the Kishon Valley one by one. Elijah suffered much in order to deliver his people from Baal worship (1Ki 18:16-40).

God sent Jesus to this world to deliver men from their sins. God sent so many of his servants to deliver his people from their sins. But it did not work as God had expected. Finally God sent his one and only Son Jesus to deliver them from their sins. This was God's choice. To carry out this mission, Jesus had to give his life as a ransom sacrifice to save his people from their sins.

Second common factor, they were all suffering servants. In fulfilling God's will, suffering is unavoidable. Moses suffered endlessly between two mothers: one was his own Hebrew mother, the other was king Pharaoh's daughter. After this, Moses received 40 years of humbleness training in the wilderness until he was humble enough to serve his people who were smitten and broken in slavery in Egypt for 430 years. When he was 80 years young, God called him to deliver his people from slavery in Egypt, with only his shepherd staff. Our God is great God, because he uses his chosen servants to fulfill God's mission through much suffering. God wanted Moses to deliver his people from their slave mentality and live according to the Law of God.

God sent his one and only Son Jesus to the world to bring his people back to his kingdom. During the time of Jesus' messianic ministry, he healed the sick and preached the good news of the kingdom of God. But the religious leaders persecuted him, simply because Jesus lived a holy life in obedience to God's will. Finally these evil men condemned Jesus as a criminal and handed him over to the Gentile rulers and crucified him. This is the reason Jesus met suffering servants Moses and Elijah before his suffering and death on the cross in Jerusalem. There is no one who does not love his own life. Most people want to save their lives, even if they have to suffer much. A human's attachment to his own life might be the strongest desire of all. In his humanness, Jesus had the same problem. In his divinity, he was determined to die for the sins of the world through his prayer. But he needed the encouragement of Moses and Elijah. After talking with Moses and Elijah, Jesus was happy to give his life for the sin of the world.

Third common factor, they were all servants of God's word. Moses received God's Law at Mount Sinai, and he delivered it to his people (Ex 19,20). Elijah spoke God's word to his people who clung to Baal worship (1Ki 18:21). Jesus came to this world to save his people from their sins. Through his painful death on the cross Jesus brought God's Law and prophecy to fulfillment.

Look at verse 31b. "They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem." At this time, Jesus had to make a final decision to go to Jerusalem to fulfill God's will for world salvation through his death on the cross. How painful it must have been for him to make the decision! But Moses and Elijah firmly encouraged Jesus to go to Jerusalem to

die on the cross as God had planned.

Third, listen to him (32-36).

Jesus took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to show a preview of his death, resurrection and of the world to come after his resurrection. Jesus also wanted them to participate in his prayer. What did they do? Verse 32a says, "Peter and his companions were very sleepy...." While Jesus was talking with Moses and Elijah, they grappled with sleepiness and fell asleep. While they were sleeping, Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah for a few minutes. When Peter and John and James became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with Jesus. In short, Jesus' conference with Moses and Elijah was over.

Look at verse 33a. "As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, 'Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.'" This verse tells us something about Peter. Peter did not say, "One for me, too." But he wanted to stay there with Jesus, Moses and Elijah forever in ease and glory. Peter revealed his fantasy dream out of sinful nature. Still, Peter was a man of worldly dream, not a man of mission. Luke comments in parentheses, "(He did not know what he was saying.)" (33b)

Look at verse 34. "While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud." In the Old Testament, a cloud represented God coming to his people (Ex 16:10; 19:9). A cloud coming down also represented God's glory (Ex 24:16).

Look at verse 35. "A voice came from the cloud, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.'" In this revelation, God appealed to the three disciples to "listen to him"--in other words, to accept his teaching concerning his crucifixion and resurrection. This event shows that it is not easy for a fallen man to listen to God's voice.

Look at verse 36a. "When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone." Moses and Elijah suddenly disappeared. Jesus remained alone. There is in this a universal truth, that Jesus remains alone in the end. Life is

nothing without Jesus. Men have too many desires; they move from one desire to another all day long, day after day, until they die. Francis of Assisi gave up everything. But in the corner of his subconsciousness, there was a hidden human desire. One night he was too lonely. So he made three snowmen--one as his wife, two as his two sons--and enjoyed them during the night. The next morning, he saw that they were melting in the sunshine, and cried in repentance.

Verse 36b says, "The disciples kept this to themselves..." The transfiguration of Jesus lasted long in their hearts as a spiritual reality. John was an exile in a cave on the island of Patmos, because he witnessed to Jesus' death and resurrection (Rev 1:9). But he did not allow evil images to enter his heart. He was filled with the glorious image of Jesus as well as the majesty of Jesus in the kingdom of God. To Peter, this glorious transfiguration was the power source to overcome the world in the course of living as a witness of his death and resurrection, since he heard God's voice on the mount of transfiguration. He said in 2 Peter 1:17b, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

We must come to the Mount of Transfiguration and see the transfigured Jesus so that eternal glory of Jesus may dwell in our hearts forever. May God help us to listen to his one word even though we are too immature to listen to God.